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MISCELLANEOUS

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

TRAGEDY

OF

HAMLET,

Prince of DENMARK.

WITH A

PREFACE,

CONTAINING

Some General REMARKS on the Writings of *Shakeſpeare.*

Μαντις δ' ἄριστος, ὅστις εἰκάζει καλῶς.

LONDON:

Printed for W. CLARKE, at *Shakeſpeare's* Head, behind the *Royal Exchange*, and ſold by W. OWEN, at *Temple-Bar*, and T. JEFFERYS, at the Corner of St. *Martin's Lane*, *Charing-Croſs*. MDCCLII.

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PREFACE.

SHAKESPEARE who firſt revived, or more properly form'd the Stage, was the greateſt Dramatic Author this Country ever produced, by the Force of a ſound Judgment, moſt lively Imagination, and a perfect Knowledge of human Nature, without the leaſt Aſſiſtance from Art, he diſpell'd thoſe condenſe Clouds of Gothic Ignorance, which at that Time obſcured us; and firſt cauſed *Britain* to appear a formidable Rival to her learned Neighbours. Nothing but a liberal Education was wanting to raiſe this great Man to the Summit of Perfection, where he would for ever have flouriſh'd unrivall'd. But the Sun itſelf has its Spots; nor was any thing as yet ever form'd entirely compleat.

Had he been converſant with the ancient Critics and Tragedians, his Genius, inſtead of being check'd or depreſs'd by an Obſer-

vance of their Rules, would have ſoar'd a nobler and ſublimer Height. A Critic of Eminence informs us, that "Grand Flights are never in more Danger than when they are left to themſelves, without Ballaſt to poiſe, or Helm to guide their Courſe, but encumber'd with their own Weight, and daring without Diſcretion."

The Unities of Time and Place he for the moſt part ſeems very little to regard; in his Obſervance of the other, he is more regular.

He indeed apologizes for this Abſurdity in his Chorus in *Henry* the Vth.

Vouchſafe to thoſe, that have not read the Story,
That I may prompt them; and of ſuch as have
I humbly pray them to admit th' Excuſe
Of *Time*, of Numbers, and true Courſe of Things,
Which cannot in their huge and proper Life
Be here preſented.

This convinces us that he himſelf was conſcious of the Error, but choſe rather to proceed in the beaten Path, than be at the Trouble of finding out a new one. But this is directly contrary to the Practice of the Ancients

cients. *Ariſtotle* has laid it down as a Rule, that the Time ſuppoſed to be employ'd in a Tragedy, ſhould be confined to a ſingle Day, or as little more as poſſible: Ὅτι μαλιϛα πειρατᾶι ὑπὸ μίαν περίοδον ἡλιϐ εἶναι, ἢ μικρὸν ἐξαλλαττειν. But I cannot ſee what Harm it can do us, if we ſuffer ourſelves to be deceived, and paſs over the length of Time neceſſary to produce the Incidents repreſented, and accompany the Poet in his Peregrinations from Place to Place, without being diſguſted at the Abſurdity, or offended at the Impoſition. Tho' *Shakeſpeare* did not bring Tragedy to the utmoſt Perfection, yet he laid ſo noble a Baſe for its future Riſe and Improvement, as exceeded the moſt ſanguine Expectations. Happy would it have been for us, if his Succeſſors could have maintained and ſupported it with equal Abilities! But alas! they were all unequal to the difficult Taſk, and ſunk under the Weight, their Maſter ſupported with Grandeur and Dignity. They are indeed more elaborate and correct, but the Sentiment and Diction can never be equall'd. Our Poet has particularly excell'd in clearly and fully marking and diſtinguiſhing the Manners of his principal Characters. Thus we know by his Diſcourſe, that *Macbeth* will break thro' all Laws human and divine to poſſeſs the Crown, tho' even at the Expence of his Peace of Mind.

Mind. Nor are we at a Loſs to determine whether the god-like *Brutus* will aſſiſt his enſlaved Country, or tamely ſubmit to the Uſurpation of an ambitious Tyrant. How well he has follow'd the Advice of *Horace*, the Reader may eaſily judge.

Ætatis cujuſque notandi ſunt tibi mores,
Mobilibuſque decor, maturis dandus & annis.
Reddere qui voces jam ſcit puer, ac pede certo
Signat humum, geſtit paribus colludere, & iram
Colligit ac ponit temere, & mutatur in horas.
Imberbus juvenis, tandem cuſtode remoto,
Gaudet equis canibuſque & aprici gramine campi:
Cereus in vitium flecti, monitoribus aſper,
Utilium tardus proviſor, prodigus æris,
Sublimis, cupiduſque & amata linquere pernix.
Converſis ſtudiis, ætas animuſque virilis
Quærit opes & amicitias, inſervit honori;
Commiſſe cavet quod mox mutare laboret.
Multa ſenem circumveniunt incommoda, vel quod
Quærit & inventis miſer abſtinet, ac timet uti;
Vel quod res omnes timide gelideque miniſtrat,
Dilator, ſpe lentus, iners, paviduſque futuri;
Difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti
Se puero, cenſor caſtigatorque minorum.

Love

Love, the uſual Subject of modern Tragedies, our Poet has very wiſely refuſed Admittance into his beſt Compoſitions, it is a Paſſion truly comic, and when introduced in Tragedy deſerves our Contempt and Deriſion, rather than Pity or Compaſſion. In *Romeo* and *Juliet* the Diſtreſs is real; yet there is none of the modern Gallantry ſo much admired: But the Play itſelf can be by no Means reckoned amongſt his beſt Pieces. The following Speech of *Juliet* has been cenſured as ridiculous, but I believe without juſt Cauſe,

Give me my *Romeo*, Night, and when he dies,
Take him and cut him out in little Stars
And he will make the Face of Heav'n ſo fine,
That all the World ſhall be in Love with Night
And pay no Worſhip to the gariſh Sun.

This evidently alludes to the ancient fabulous Hiſtories, of Mortals, being received into the Heavens, and metamorphoſed into Conſtellations. *Juliet*, by a beautiful Hyperbole, ſays, that *Romeo*'s Body entire, would not only make a Star, but, divided in ſeveral Parts, would form ſo many different ſplendid Appearances. *Otway*, who next to our Poet commands the Paſſions, has

has given us in his *Venice preſerv'd*, many nice and judicious Touches of Nature. Notwithſtanding all its Faults, it is by far the beſt of his Performances. The Character of *Jaffier* is a Maſter-Piece, and the deſperate Struggles between Love and Friendſhip, are admirably and ſtrongly repreſented. But inſtead of avoiding the greateſt Fault of our Poet, he has taken all imaginable Care to commit the ſame Crime, he has defiled his Scenes with ridiculous Dialogues between *Antonio* and *Aquilina*, which do not ſo much as even deſerve the Name of Farce. The Ghoſts of *Jaffier* and *Pierre* are introduced without any Effect, and inſtead of raiſing Terror, only excite Laughter. Though *Shakeſpeare* has for the moſt Part cauſed his Kings and Heroes to maintain their Dignity, without ſtooping into vulgar Phraſe, yet he ſometimes makes them deſcend from their Characters, and uſe the Language of a Buffoon. Thus *Henry* the Vth, juſt before the Battle of *Agincourt*.

" Indeed the *French* may lay twenty *French* Crowns to one they will beat us, for they bear them on their Shoulders; but it is no *Engliſh* Treaſon to cut *French* Crowns, and To-morrow the King himſelf will be a Clipper," and immediately after, falls into that beautiful Soliloquy,

Upon

Upon the King! Let us our Lives, our Souls,
Our Debts, our careful Wives, our Children, and
Our Sins, lay on the King; he muſt bear all.

the Chorus in the ſame Play, quibbles notoriouſly, ſpeaking of the Conſpirators who

Have for the *Gilt* of *France* (O *Guilt* indeed!)
Confirm'd Conſpiracy with fearful *France*.

In other Places he has directly followed the Advice of the Critic.

Intererit multum Divuſne loquatur, an heros;
Maturuſne ſenex, an adhuc florente juventâ
Fervidus; & matrona potens, an ſedula nutrix;
Mercatorne vagus, cultorne virentis agelli;
Colchus, an Aſſyrius; Thebis nutritus, an Argis.

No Perſon hath been more commended for an honeſt Integrity of Heart than our Poet; but he is not free from that Court Vice, Flattery. In his *Macbeth*, he openly digreſſes to pay a Compliment to the Prince then on the Throne; and whenever he has occaſion to ſpeak of Kings, makes uſe of

the moſt religious Terms. But in this he only imitates his Betters; *Horace* and *Virgil* have given the cruel, the bloody *Auguſtus* a Seat in the Synod of the Gods, and dignified him with the Attributes of the ſupreme Being. Nor is this Method of Deification, unknown to the Moderns. A late Author in his *Carmen ſeculare* has not been far behind them, ſpeaking of K. *W.* 3d.

——— Nothing went before ſo great,
And nothing greater can ſucceed.

Tho' this is little leſs than a Tranſlation of *Horace*'s.

——— *Nil ortum tale,*
Nec Viget quicquid ſimile aut ſecundum.—

And in another Place,

We Angels Forms, in pious Monarchs view:
We reverence *W.*——, for he acts like you.

meaning like Angels.

Mr. *Rowe* in his *Tamerlane*, a Character deſigned for the ſame Monarch, deſcribes him as,

———Mark'd out
The Scourge of lawleſs Pride and dire Ambition,
The great Avenger of the groaning World.

Well

Well has he worn the ſacred Cauſe of Juſtice
Upon his proſp'rous Sword, approving Heav'n
Still crown'd the righteous Warrior with Succeſs;
As if he ſaid, *Go forth, and be my Champion,*
Thou moſt like me of all my Works below.

Who can read theſe fulſome Extravagancies, without a ſecret Contempt of the Author's Servility? But Flattery is as inſeparable from a Place or Penſion, as Satire is from Diſmiſſion or Neglect. *Bajazet* when defeated and taken Priſoner is compar'd to the proud Arch-Angel,

fall'n from the Height,
Where once, ev'n next to Majeſty divine,
Enthron'd he ſat, down to the vile Deſcent
And Lowneſs of a Slave.———

And in Truth, he ſeems to have ſomething of *Milton*'s Devil in his Compoſition. It cannot be preſuming too far, to aſſert that the Poet was beholden to *Paradiſe Loſt* for this Character, and has tranſplanted the Temper and Vices of *Satan* into the Breaſt of *Bajazet*. I cannot conclude without doing Juſtice to thoſe *ingenious* Gentlemen, who have thought proper to alter ſome of *Shakeſpeare*'s Plays.

Mr. *Dryden* and Sir *William Davenant* judi-

judiciouſly made Choice of the *Tempeſt*, the moſt regular and correct of all our Poet's Works, and the Reſult was natural: they formed a very bad Play out of a very good one. The Duke of *Buckingham* obſerving that *Julius Cæſar* was ſpun out to the Death of *Brutus* and *Caſſius*, reſolved to divide it into two Plays; and after much Trouble and Pains at length preſented us with the moſt wretched Performances that were ever exhibited on the *Engliſh* Stage. *Durfey* and *Cibber* hardly deſerve our Notice; but we muſt not omit one *Tate*, a Writer, devoid of all Spirit and good Taſte, not deſerving to be rank'd in the meaneſt Claſs of the meaneſt Poetaſters, who thinking the Cataſtrophe of *Lear* too pathetic and moving, caſt aſide the moſt beautiful Part, and made us *ample Amends* by inſerting his own vile Ribbaldry. Such has been the Fate of all thoſe who have preſumed to alter *Shakeſpeare*, without trying

Quid valeant humeri, quid ferre recuſent.

And ſuch will be the Fate of all future Pretenders, unleſs their Fancy be as pregnant, their Judgment as ſtrong, and their Knowledge as piercing and univerſal, as the Poet's himſelf.

OBSER-

OBSERVATIONS ON *HAMLET.*

NOTE I.

ACT I. SCENE I.

LAST Night of all,
When yon ſame Star that's Weſt-
ward from the Pole,
Had made his Courſe t' illume that
Part of Heaven
Where now it burns, *Marcellus*
and myſelf,
The Bell then beating One———

Enter the Ghoſt.

Peace, break thee off; look where it comes again—

The Poet has ſhown his Judgment in the Conduct of this Scene. The Time is Midnight, the Place

a Platform before the Palace, upon which two Officers make their Appearance, and along with them a Gentleman to whom they had communicated what they had ſeen two Nights ſucceſſively, who wanted ocular Demonſtration before he would credit the ſurpriſing Story. The Centinel is about to give a long circumſtantial Narration, when he is unexpectedly interrupted by the Entrance of the Ghoſt. The Truth of the Obſervation

Segnius irritant animos demiſſa per aurem,
Quam quæ ſunt occulis ſubjecta fidelibus.

is here apparent.

The moſt artful and ſpirited Recital could never have raiſed the Terror that poſſeſſes the Spectators at the Appearance of the Phantom, who, from firſt to laſt, is grand and majeſtick, and maintains an equal Character. *Shakeſpeare* has ſtrictly obſerved that Rule of *Horace*,

Nec Deus interſit niſi dignus vindice nodus.

He has raiſed the dead, but it is to reveal a Secret which had never been diſcovered but by the Intervention and Aſſiſtance of a ſuper-natural Power. None of his Plays are deſtitute of a Moral, this carries a noble one. "Though a Villain may for a Time eſcape Juſtice, and enjoy the Fruits of his Wickedneſs, yet divine Providence will at length overtake him in the Height of his Career, and bring him to condign Puniſhment."

Raro antecedentem ſceleſtum
Deſeruit Pœna, pede claudo.

It had been better for his Succeſſors in the Drama, had

had this Play never been written; for when they obſerved the univerſal Applauſe he received, and indeed very juſtly deſerved, for introducing on the Stage, this inimitable Piece of Machinery, they took Care to croud their Plays with Ghoſts, tho' they had no other Effect than to frighten and delight the credulous and ignorant. Thus what in the Hands of an able Maſter, is noble and ſublime; attempted by a Bungler, appears abſurd and ridiculous.

The Rev. Mr. *Upton* in his Obſervations on this Author, has made a ſlight Miſtake in calling *Horatio* a Soldier, who was in Fact a Student at *Wittenberg*, where an Univerſity at that Time flouriſhed, along with young *Hamlet*, and came to *Elſinoor* to be a Spectator of the Funeral of his Friend's Father. This is evident from the Prince's firſt Salutation.

Ham. What makes you from *Wittenberg*, *Horatio?*
Hor. A truant Diſpoſition, good my Lord.
Ham. I know you are no Truant.
But what is your Affair in *Elſinoor?*
Hor. My Lord, I came to ſee your Father's Funeral.

NOTE

NOTE II.

IN the moſt high and palmy State of *Rome*,
A little e'er the mightieſt *Julius* fell,
The Graves ſtood tenantleſs, the ſheeted dead
Did ſqueak and gibber in the *Roman* Streets;
Stars ſhone with Trains of Fire, Dews of Blood fell;
Diſaſters veil'd the Sun; and the moiſt Star,
Upon whoſe Influence *Neptune*'s Empire ſtands,
Was ſick almoſt to Dooms-day with Eclipſe.

Shakeſpeare ſeems to have had before him *Virgil*'s Deſcription of the Prodigies preceding the Aſſaſſination of *Julius Cæſar:* As it is highly beautiful and poetical, I make no Doubt but the claſſical Reader will eaſily pardon me for inſerting it.

— Sol extincto miſeratus Cæſare Romam,
Cum caput obſcura nitidum ferrugine texit,
Impiaque æternam timuerunt ſecula noctem.
Tempore quanquam illo tellus quoque & æquora ponti,
Obſcænique canes, importunæque volucres
Signa dabant. Quoties Cyclopum effervere in agros
Vidimus undantem ruptis fornacibus Ætnam,
Flammarumque globos, liquefactaque volvere ſaxa?
Armorum ſonitum toto Germania cœlo
Audiit: Inſolitis tremuerunt motibus Alpes.
Vox quoque per Lucos vulgo exaudita ſilentes
Ingens, & ſimulacra modis pallentia miris
Viſa ſub obſcurum noctis; Pecudeſque locutæ
Infandum! Siſtunt Amnes, terræque dehiſcunt;
Et Mæſtum illacrymat templis ebur, æraque ſudant.
Proluit inſano contorquens vortice ſylvas
Fluviorum

Fluviorum rex Eridanus; campoſque per omnes
Cum ſtabulis armenta tulit. Nec tempore eodem
Triſtibus aut extis fibræ apparere minaces,
Aut puteis manare cruor ceſſavit; & alte
Per noctem reſonare, lupis ululantibus, urbes.
Non alias cœlo ceciderunt plura ſereno
Fulgura; nec diri toties arſere cometæ.

GEOR. Lib. I.

NOTE III.

I HAVE heard,
The Cock that is the Trumpet to the Morn,
Doth with his lofty and ſhrill-ſounding Throat
Awake the God of Day; and at his Warning,
Whether in Sea or Fire, in Earth or Air,
Th' extravagant and erring Spirit hies
To his Confine.———

To hold a firm Belief in Apparitions, Witches, Demons, *&c.* was general in the Time of our Poet. In that ſuperſtitious Age it was univerſally imagined, that Spirits who had Leave to wander Abroad during the Night, were obliged to return to their Graves at the firſt Approach of Day.

But ſoft, methinks I ſcent the Morning Air,
Brief let me be.———

The Glow-Worm ſhows the Morning to be near,
And 'gins to pale her uneffectual Fire,
Adieu, Adieu, Adieu.——

Virgil

Virgil cauſes the Shade of *Anchiſes* to depart with the ſame Precipitation.

—Vale, torquet medios nox humida curſus,
Et me ſævus equis oriens afflavit anhelis.

NOTE IV.

—'GAINST that Seaſon comes
Wherein our Saviour's Birth is celebrated;
The Bird of Dawning ſingeth all Night long:
And then, they ſay, no Spirit walks abroad;
The Nights are wholeſome, then no Planets ſtrike,
No Fairy takes, no Witch hath Power to charm,
So hallow'd and ſo gracious is the Time.

If *Ignorance is the Mother of Devotion*, it is to be wiſhed that this Age had not excelled the former in Knowledge. Our Anceſtors, believed *too much*, We, *too little*. Pity it is, but ſome Medium had been found between theſe Extremes, that might have reſtrained Superſtition and Atheiſm in cloſer Bounds. The Expreſſion *no Fairy takes* is ſomething obſcure, the Meaning is, that their Wiles and Deceits are fruſtrated on account of the Sacredneſs of the Time. He cannot be ſuppoſed to mean the innocent Part of that diminutive Species, who are reported to paſs the Night very harmleſly in dancing round the Rings or Circles, we often ſee in Paſtures; but thoſe unlucky and knaviſh Sprites, who in the different Shapes of Horſes, Hogs, Hounds, Bears, Meteors and various other Appearances,

Appearances, miſlead benighted Travellers, and play a thouſand unlucky Pranks.

See the Midſummer Night's Dream.

NOTE V.

Scene V.

THE charieſt Maid is prodigal enough,
If ſhe unmaſk her Beauties to the Moon:
Virtue itſelf 'ſcapes not calumnious Strokes;
The Canker galls the Infants of the Spring,
Too oft before the Buttons are diſclos'd;
And in the Morn and liquid Dew of Youth,
Contagious Blaſtments are moſt imminent.

This Play every where abounds with juſt, excellent and moral Precepts, which I cannot too warmly recommend to the ſerious Peruſal and Conſideration of every young Lady in *Great-Britain*; who, did they but ſeriouſly reflect, that each unguarded Word or Action, however innocent the Intention may be, is liable to be baſely miſrepreſented by the deſigning Arts of malicious Slanderers, would have a greater Regard to their Conduct and Behaviour, than they ſeem to have at preſent. Their Univerſality and Power of this faſhionable Vice is well deſcribed by *Beaumont* and *Fletcher* in their *Philaſter*, or *Love lies a Bleeding*.

O where is Honour ſafe? Not with the Living;
They feed upon Opinions, Errors, Dreams,
And make them Truths: They draw a Nouriſhment
Out

Out of Defamings, grow upon Diſgraces,
And when they ſee a Virtue fortify'd
Strongly above the Batt'ry of their Tongues,
Oh, how they caſt to ſink it, and defeated,
Soul-ſick with Poiſon, ſtrike the Monuments
Where noble Names lie ſleeping, 'till they Sweat,
And the cold Marble melt.———

NOTE VI.

Scene VIII.

I AM thy Father's Spirit.
Doom'd for a certain Time, to walk the Night,
And for the Day *confin'd to faſt* in Fires,
'Till the foul Crimes, done in my Days of Nature,
Are burnt and purg'd away.

So all the Editions read, till the laſt ingenious Editor of *Shakeſpeare*, obſerving a Deficiency in the Senſe, alter'd it to

For the Day *confin'd too faſt* in Fires.

This is vaſtly preferable to the common Reading, and yet I cannot think it the true one. For the Ghoſt to complain he was *too* cloſely confin'd, ſeems to carry a Reflection againſt Providence, as if his Puniſhment was too ſevere for his Crimes. Inſtead of making any Alteration, let us eraze this troubleſome Particle, which ſeems to have been by ſome Means foiſted into the Text, and read the Word *confined* at length, without any Contraction,

traction, and we ſhall find it anſwer our Purpoſe,

For the Day, *confined* faſt in Fires.

this is agreeable to the Verſification of *Shakeſpeare*.

NOTE VII.

NOthing is more detrimental to an Author, than a Swarm of injudicious Commentators and Editors, who place his Faults in the ſtrongeſt and moſt glaring Light, but refine his Beauties with ſo liberal a Hand, that at length they become obſcure, and almoſt imperceptible. Some of theſe Critics will throw away a great deal of their Time, and turn over a Number of obſolete worm-eaten Authors, with no other Intent than to rectify the Orthography of a miſerable Pun; whilſt whatever really wants an Explanation, is paſſed by as too inconſiderable to have any Notice taken of it, or ſuppoſed to be intelligible to the moſt incapacitated Reader. I have often wondered how the following Paſſage could paſs through the Hands of Men of Genius and Learning without attracting their Regard, and be handed down to us with the ſame Inaccuracy it was firſt printed.

I find thee apt;
And duller *ſhouldſt* thou be than the fat Weed,
That roots itſelf in Eaſe on *Lethe*'s Wharf,
Wouldſt thou not ſtir in this.

To ſtrike the leaſt Senſe out of this extraordinary Speech, we muſt read it with a Note of Interrogation; and even then it is ſcarce paſſable. What Occaſion had the Ghoſt to put ſo unaccountable a Queſtion, and that founded on a Suppoſition, to a Son he found on fire to revenge him? A Word is indeed tranſpos'd, which I have re-eſtabliſhed in its proper Place, and gained Senſe cheaply by a trivial Alteration. It cannot be doubted but *Shakeſpeare* wrote,

I find thee apt;
And duller *wouldſt* thou be than the fat Weed,
That roots itſelf in Eaſe on *Lethe*'s Wharf,
Shouldſt thou not ſtir in this.———

i. e. *I find thee eager and ready to revenge my Injuries*; but that is no Wonder, *thou wouldſt be duller than Sloth itſelf ſhould not the Wrongs I have received incite thee to take the moſt exemplary Vengeance on my Murtherer.* This is pertinent and natural, and we find the Ghoſt ſpeak a little more to the Purpoſe.

NOTE

NOTE VIII.

ACT II. SCENE IV.

IT likes us well,
And at our more conſider'd Time we'll read,
Anſwer and think upon this Buſineſs,

The Poet or his Editors are guilty of a Blunder, by cauſing the King to declare he would give an Anſwer to an Affair before he had conſidered it. It is to be ſuppoſed *Shakeſpeare* wrote to this Purpoſe.

And at our more conſider'd Time we'll read,
And think upon, and anſwer to this Buſineſs.

NOTE IX.

AT ſuch a Time I'll looſe my Daughter to him:
Be you and I behind the Arras, then,
Mark the Encounter.

It cannot hurt the Senſe, and would it not read better if we ſhould alter it to

Let you and I behind the Arras then,
Mark the Encounter.

NOTE X.

Scene VI.

"IS it not ſtrange; for mine Uncle is King of *Denmark*; and thoſe that wou'd make Mouths at him while my Father liv'd, give twenty, forty, fifty, an hundred Ducats a-piece, for his Picture in little. There is ſomething in this more than natural, if Philoſophy could find it out."

Not in the leaſt. Had *Hamlet* been acquainted with Mankind, he would ſoon have found, that nothing is more common, than to ſee thoſe very Perſons who inſult a Man, when he is in no Condition to revenge himſelf, idolize and worſhip him, when in a ſuperior Station.

The great Man down, you mark his Fav'rite flies;
The Poor advanc'd, makes Friends of Enemies.
And hitherto doth Love on Fortune tend.—

NOTE

NOTE XI.

Scene VII.

THE rugged *Pyrrhus*, he, whoſe ſab Arms,
Black as his Purpoſe, did the Night reſemble,
When he lay couched in the ominous Horſe,
Hath now his dread and black Complexion ſmear'd
With Heraldry more diſmal; Head to Foot,
Now he is total Gules, horridly trickt
With Blood of Fathers, Mothers, Daughters, Sons,
Baked and impaſted with the parching Fires,
That lend a *tyrannous* and damned Light
To Murthers vile.

He who can underſtand what is meant by the Fires lending a *tyrannous* Light, is at Liberty to adhere to the old Reading. I own it is not ſo plain to me, but it ſeems to want an Emendation. Tho' I would not willingly preſume too far, and conſult what *Shakeſpeare ſhould have written*, rather than what he *did really write*, yet I will venture to aſſert that the following Reading would be much more natural than the former.

—— the parching Fires,
That lend a *treacherous* and damned Light,
To the vile Murtherer.

i. e. The Streets being in Flames afford a *treacherous* Light.

Treacherous

Treacherous becauſe they betray their Maſters, (who might otherwiſe have probably eſcaped by the Aſſiſtance of the Night) to the deſtroying *Pyrrhus*. The Speeches ſo warmly commended by the Poet in the Character of *Hamlet*, have been condemned as full of Bombaſt. But I never remember to have read a nobler Deſcription of the Silence uſually preceding a Hurricane.

—— We often ſee againſt ſome Storm,
A Silence in the Heav'ns, the Rack ſtand ſtill,
The bold Winds ſpeechleſs, and the Orb below
As huſh as Death.

It is manifeſt from *Shakeſpeare*'s Deſcription of the Death of *Priam*, that he was not well acquainted with the Claſſics. Notwithſtanding he has deviated from *Virgil*'s Account of that Event, yet he has found the Way to make the Cataſtrophe more moving and poetical.

Pyrrhus finds him,
Striking too ſhort at *Greeks*, his antick Sword
Rebellious to his Arm, lies where it falls,
Repugnant to Command; unequal match'd
Pyrrhus at *Priam* drives, in Rage ſtrikes wide,
But with the Whiff and Wind of his fell Sword,
Th' unnerved Father falls. Then ſenſeleſs *Ilium*
Seeming to feel this Blow, with flaming Top
Stoops to its Baſe, and with a hideous Craſh
Takes Pris'ner *Pyrrhus* Ear: For, lo! his Sword
Which was declining on the milky Head
Of reverend *Priam*, ſeem'd i'th' Air to ſtick;

So

So like a painted Tyrant *Pyrrhus* ſtood,
And as a Neutral to his Will and Matter
Did nothing.——

NOTE XII.

Scene VIII.

THIS is moſt brave,
That I the Son of the dear murthered,
Muſt like a Whore, *unpack* my Heart with Words.

Unpack, metaphorically ſpoken, and ſignifies Eaſe, unload, diſburthen.

NOTE XIII.

ACT III. Scene I.

WE have cloſely ſent for *Hamlet* hither,
That he, as 'twere by Accident, may here
Affront Ophelia. Her Father and myſelf,

Will

Will ſo beſtow ourſelves, that ſeeing, unſeen,
We may of their Encounter frankly judge.

Affront in this Place has the ſame Signification with confront, meet, face, *&c.* from *affrontare*, *Ital.*

After

——her Father and myſelf,

The old Folio adds,

lawful Eſpials

which has been omitted in all the late Editions. *Eſpial*, now obſolete, is the ſame as *Spie*, and often uſed by *Shakeſpeare* in that Senſe.

NOTE XIV.

Scene II.

TO be, or not to be? that is the Queſtion.—
Whether 'tis nobler in the Mind, to ſuffer
The Stings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune;
Or to take Arms againſt aſſailing Troubles,
And by oppoſing end them? To die—to ſleep—

No

No more; and by a Sleep to ſay we end
The Heart-Ach, and the thouſand natural
Shocks
That Fleſh is Heir to; 'tis a Conſummation
Devoutly to be wiſh'd. To die—to ſleep—
To ſleep? Perchance to dream; aye, there's
the Rub——
For in that Sleep of Death what Dreams may
come,
When we have ſhuffled off this mortal Coil,
Muſt give us Pauſe———There's the Re-
ſpect,
That makes Calamity of ſo long Life.
For who would bear the Whips and Scorns of
Time,
Th' Oppreſſor's Wrong, the proud Man's
Contumely,
The Pangs of deſpis'd Love, the Laws Delay,
The Inſolence of Office, and the Spurns
That patient Merit of th' unworthy takes;
When he himſelf might his *Quietus* make
With a bare Bodkin? Who would Fardles
bear,
To groan and ſweat under a weary Life?
But that the Fear of *ſomething* after Death,
(That undiſcover'd Country, from whoſe
Bourne
No Traveller returns) puzzles the Will;
And makes us rather bear thoſe Ills we have,
Than fly to others, that we know not of.
Thus Conſcience does make Cowards of us
all:
And thus the native Hue of Reſolution,
Is ſicklied o'er with a pale Caſt of Thought;
And Enterprizes of great Pith and Moment,

With this Regard their Currents turn awry,
And loſe the Name of Action.

A Gentleman of whoſe Judgment I have the higheſt Opinion, was pleaſed to propoſe an Alteration, and for

The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,

would read

The *Stings and Harrows* of outrageous Fortune.

Shakeſpeare uſes *the Verb* in another Place in this Play.

It *harrows* me with Fear and Wonder.

The Reader is at his Liberty to embrace or reject this Reading, but it carries an Air of Probability along with it, and rather mends than injures the Senſe. *Hamlet* was ſo much dejected and chagrin'd at the ſudden Death of a Father, whom he affectionately loved, and the over-haſty inceſtuous Marriage of his Mother, that he ſincerely wiſhes for Diſſolution.

Oh, that this too, too-ſolid Fleſh would melt,
Thaw, and reſolve itſelf into a Dew.

But the Fear of offending the Author of Being, by acting contrary to the End and Deſign of his Being, reſtrained him from putting an End to a Life he was willing to loſe. His Mind, even

even before he was aſcertained of his Father's violent Death, miſgave him *that all was not well:* But when that Maſter-piece of Villainy was diſcloſed, the Deſire of Death return'd with double Force, and he ſeriouſly debates with himſelf, whether it was better to live or die. It had been repreſented to him, that Death was the End of Sorrow, Shame and Pain--that, *after Life's fitful Fever we ſleep well*——that in the Grave we are at reſt for ever——there the Pangs of Love are felt no more——the Captive regains his Liberty——and the Wretch whoſe Life has been a melancholy Series of Miſery and Misfortune, finds a ſafe Aſylum. *Hamlet* wanted only to be convinced of the Truth of this Doctrine, to form his Reſolutions. He revolves it in his Mind——is Death, ſays he, no more than a Sleep, and will no Dreams diſturb us—there is the fearful Point. The Dread of what may happen, when we have ſhaken off this Maſk of Fleſh, puzzles and confounds us. Our Proſpect of Futurity is obſcured by Clouds and Darkneſs impenetrable. Nor can any Viſitor return, to give us an Account of that unknown Region. We therefore chuſe rather tamely to ſubmit to all the Ills Fate may lay upon us, than fly to others which may be more laſting and ſevere. Thus a Conſciouſneſs of our Crimes, melts and diſſolves our firmeſt Reſolutions.

This is not the only Place, this excellent Man, endeavours to convince us of the Folly and Danger of Suicide. In his *Meaſure for Meaſure* he paints Death in ſuch glaring Co-

lours, that even the good Man muſt ſhudder at the Thoughts of Diſſolution.

Aye, but to die, and go we know not whither,
To lie in cold Obſtruction and to rot;
This ſenſible warm Motion to become
A kneaded Clod; and the delighted Spirit
To bath in fiery Floods, or to reſide
In thrilling Regions of thick ribb'd Ice:
To be impriſon'd in the viewleſs Winds,
Or blown with reſtleſs Violence about
This pendant World; or to be worſe than worſt
Of thoſe, that lawleſs and uncertain Thought
Imagines howling; 'tis too horrible!
The wearieſt and moſt loathed worldly Life,
That Pain, Age, Penury and Impriſonment
Can lay on Nature, is a Paradiſe
To what we Fear of Death.——

If the curious Reader will take the Trouble to compare this with *Virgil*'s Deſcription of the Tortures of the damn'd, he will find the *Avonian* not at all inferior to the *Mantuan* Bard.——

The witty Earl of *Roſcommon* ſeems to have adopted the Sentiments of our Poet in his Poem entitled, the Proſpect of Death.

Meerly to die, no Man of Reaſon fears:
For certainly we muſt
As we are born, return to Duſt:
Death's the laſt Point of many ling'ring Years,
But whither then we go,
Whither, we fain would know,
But human Underſtanding cannot ſhow:

This

This makes us tremble and creates
Strange Apprehenſions in the Mind,
Fills it with reſtleſs Doubts and wild Debates,
Concerning what we living cannot find.
None know what Death is, but the dead:
Therefore we all, by Nature, dying dread,
As a ſtrange, doubtful Way, we know not
how to tread.

Shakeſpeare, amongſt the Evils of a corrupt, degenerate Age, reckons, what he elegantly calls

The Inſolence of Office.

There is nothing more common, and nothing more deſerving the ſevereſt Cenſure, than the Contempt and Scorn with which Men in Power treat their Inferiors. The Love of Sway is implanted deep in every Breaſt, and we take all Opportunities of ſhowing our Authority. Our Author in another Place levels the whole Artillery of his Eloquence againſt the Abuſe of Power, and the Haughtineſs of her Miniſters.

——— could great Men thunder
As *Jove* himſelf does, *Jove* would ne'er be
quiet;
For ev'ry *pelting*, *petty* Officer
Would uſe his Heaven for Thunder:
Nothing but Thunder: Merciful Heav'n!
Thou rather with thy ſharp and ſulph'rous
Bolt
Splitſt the unwedgeable and gnarled Oak

Than

Than the ſoft Myrtle: Oh, but Man! Proud
Man
Dreſs'd in a little brief Authority,
Like an angry Ape,
Plays ſuch fantaſtick Tricks before high Heav'n,
As makes the Angels weep.———

NOTE XV.

Scene IV.

SINCE my dear Soul, was Miſtreſs of her
Choice,
And could of Men diſtinguiſh, her Election
Has ſeal'd thee for herſelf. For thou haſt been
As one in ſuffering all, that ſuffers nothing:
A Man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Has ta'en with equal Thanks, and bleſt are
thoſe,
Whoſe Blood and Judgment are ſo well co-
mingled,
That they are not a Pipe for Fortune's Finger
To ſound what Stop ſhe pleaſe. Give me that
Man
That is not Paſſion's Slave, and I will wear
him
In my Heart's Core: Aye in my Heart of
Heart.

Hamlet

Hamlet is every where deſcribed as a Soldier, Scholar, and Philoſopher, and he has given the greateſt Proof of a conſummate Judgment, in his judicious Choice of a Friend and Companion. No ſervile Flatterer, no baſe Pandar to his Luſt, was permitted to ſhare his Heart, but he ſelected a Man from the Multitude, who was equally acquainted with the Frowns of Adverſity and the Smiles of Proſperity; one, who however capricious Fortune changed the Scene, was ſtill maſter of himſelf, and maintained an equal Serenity of Temper. He was what *Horace* calls

——————— Sapiens,
Reſponſare cupidinibus, contemnere honores,
Fortis; & in ſeipſo totus, teres, atque rotundus.

In his faithful Breaſt, he lodged his deareſt Secrets, nor were they ever revealed. He was a Friend in Reality, more than in Name; and when his Prince was expiring, would have attended him to the other World, had he not been prohibited by his expreſs Order and Command. Such are the Effects of a Friendſhip which has for its Baſis, Reaſon and Virtue.

NOTE

NOTE XVI.

SCENE VI.

THE Inſtances that ſecond Marriage move,
Are baſe Reſpects of Thrift, but none of Love.

This Obſervation, however ſatyrical and ill-natured it may ſeem, is nevertheleſs extremely juſt. The real and pure Paſſion of Love dies with the Object on which it firſt fixes. Altho' ſecond Marriages are allowable by the Laws of Society, yet they moſtly are occaſioned by a View of Self-Intereſt, or an Appetite too odious to mention. This was the Opinion of all the Ancients who reckoned ſecond Marriages infamous, as carrying a Suſpicion of Incontinency. *Valerius* tells us, Book II. *Olim, quæ uno matrimonio contentæ fuerunt, coronâ pudicitiæ honorabantur: multorum matrimoniorum experientiam legitimæ cujuſdam intemperantiæ ſignum credentes.* For this Reaſon, *Æneas*, when he unexpectedly meets with *Andromache* in *Epirus*, puts this Queſtion to her

Hectoris, Andromache, Pyrrhin' connubia ſervas?

which

which ſeems to reflect on her, for ſubmitting to marry *Pyrrhus*, notwithſtanding ſhe was his Slave, and entirely under his Command. *Dido*, who knew what belonged to ſtrict Modeſty, when ſhe revealed her Love for the *Trojan* Prince, to her affectionate Siſter, calls it a *Crime*, altho' her *Sichæus* was no more,

Huic, uni, forſan potui ſuccumbere *culpæ*.

And ſoon after wiſhes that Thunder might ſtrike her to the Center if ever ſhe violated the ſacred Laws of Modeſty by receiving a ſecond Huſband in her Bed and Arms.

Sed mihi vel tellus optem prius ima dehiſcat
Vel pater omnipotens adigat me fulmine ad umbras,
Pallentes umbras Erebi, noctemque profundam,
Ante, pudor, quam te violo, aut tua jura reſolvo.
Ille meos, primus qui me ſibi junxit, amores
Abſtulit: ille habeat ſecum, ſervatque ſepulcro.

But *Dido* was a Woman, and her firmeſt Reſolves ſoon melted into Air: Her Flame was too violent to be aſſuaged by the Dictates of Reaſon, and ſhe took the Opportunity of a tempeſtuous Day to conduct the *pious* Hero to a gloomy Cave, and there indulged her Appetites at the Expence of her Modeſty.

In ſeveral Parts of this Play the Poet ſeems to level his Satyr againſt the Fair Sex. Nothing can be produced ſo ſevere as

Frailty, thy Name is, Woman.

the

——— Varium & mutabile ſemper
Fæmina,

of *Virgil*, has not half the Poignancy.

concealed under the Character of *Hamlet*, he laſhes the pretty engaging Arts made uſe of by the Ladies of his Time, and even yet not out of Faſhion.

" I have heard of your Painting too, well enough; God has given you one Face, and you make yourſelves another. You jig, you amble, you liſp and nickname God's Creatures, and make your Wantonneſs your Ignorance."

NOTE XVII.

NOR Earth to give me Food, nor Heav'n Light!
Sport and Repoſe lock from me Day and Night.
To Deſperation turn my Truſt and Hope!
An Anchor's Cheer in Priſon be my Scope!

Each

Each oppoſite that blanks the Face of Joy,
Meet what I would have well, and it deſtroy!
Both here and hence, purſue me laſting Strife!
If, once a Widow, ever I be Wife.——

The firſt of theſe Lines is ungrammatical, and ſhould be regulated thus,

Let Earth not give me Food, nor Heav'n Light.

NOTE XVIII.

Scene VII.

HAMLET is ſo intent upon revenging his Father's Death, that in his counterfeit Madneſs, he cannot avoid throwing out Threats againſt the King and Queen, which to the Byſtanders, who were ignorant of the Fact, were unintelligible.

Guil. The King, Sir, is marvellous diſtempered with Choler.

Ham. Your Wiſdom would ſhew itſelf more rich to ſignify this to his Doctor: *For me to put him to his Purgation, would perhaps plunge him in more Choler.*

In another Place,

" I ſay we'll have no more Marriages, thoſe who are married already, *all but one*, ſhall live."

NOTE XIX.

'TIS now the very witching Time of Night,
When Church-Yards yawn, and Hell itſelf breaths out
Contagion to this World.

Shakeſpeare, according to ancient Superſtition, has every where repreſented Night as unhallowed and prophane: In his *Macbeth* he has deſcribed it with the greateſt Horror.

— Now o'er one half the Globe
Nature ſeems dead, and wicked Dreams abuſe
The curtain'd Sleep: Now Witchcraft celebrates
Pale *Hecate*'s Offerings, and wither'd Murther
(Alarum'd by his Centinel the Wolf,
Whoſe Howl's his Watch) with his ſtealthy Pace,
With *Tarquin* raviſhing, ſlides tow'rd his Deſign,
Moves like a Ghoſt.——

It was Night when *Canidia* and her infernal Crew performed their diabolical Operations, of which *Priapus* ſo grievouſly complains. Hor. Sat. 8. Book I.

NOTE XX.

Scene VIII.

IN the *corrupted Currents* of this World,
Offence's gilded Hand may ſhove by Juſtice.
And oft' 'tis ſeen the wicked Prize itſelf,
Buys out the Law.———

This Reading might paſs, if no better could be found. I am perſuaded *Shakeſpeare* wrote

In the *corrupt Occurrents* of this World.

i. e. *in the Tranſactions of this corrupted World, Villains by Means of their Wealth evade Juſtice, and eſcape with Impunity.* He uſes *Occurrents* in this Senſe in the laſt Act.

So tell him with th' *Occurrents* more or leſs,
Which have ſollicited.

NOTE XXI.

Scene IX.

—THAT would be ſcann'd,
A Villain kills my Father, and for that,
I, his *ſole* Son do this ſame Villain ſend
To Heaven.——

So all the Editions read except the laſt, the Editor of which hath the following Note on this Paſſage.

I his *ſole* Son do this ſame Villain ſend

"The Folio reads *foule Son*, this will lead us to the true Reading, which is, *fal'n* Son, i. e. diſinherited. This was an Aggravation of the Injury; that he had not only murther'd the Father, but ruined the Son." I would not willingly differ from a Gentleman of Mr. *W*——'s Learning and Judgment, but I cannot ſee any Want of an Emendation in this Place. The old Reading to me ſeems the more plauſible. *Sole* in this Place is a very emphatical Expreſſion. *Hamlet* means by it, that he was his *only* Son, and conſequently ought to be his chief Avenger, inſtead of doing an Act of Kindneſs to the Aſſaſſin. Moreover *Hamlet* could not be ſaid with any Propriety

Propriety to be *fal'n*. The King had indeed, as he expreſſes it,

Popt in between th' Election and his Hopes.

But yet had done him the Juſtice to appoint him his Succeſſor in the Kingdom.

——— let the World take Note,
You are the moſt immediate to our Throne.
Our chiefeſt Courtier, Couſin, and our Son.

NOTE XXII.

Scene X.

A Bloody Deed; almoſt as bad, good Mother,
As kill a King, and marry with his Brother.

We are not expreſly informed whether the Queen was conſcious of, or concerned in, the Death of her Huſband: But Probability muſt paſs for Truth, as no Certainty can be obtain'd. The Ghoſt, in the Account he gives, ſays, that his Brother was the Perſon who actually deprived him of his Life.

Upon my ſecure Hour, thy Uncle ſtole,
With Juice of curſed Hebenon in a Phial.

It

It ſeems pretty plain that the Murtherer had obtained the Good-will of the Queen before he perpetrated the Fact.

——— thy Uncle,
That inceſtuous, that adulterate Beaſt,
With Witchcraft of his Wits, with traiterous Gifts,
Won to his ſhameful Luſt,
The Will of my moſt ſeeming virtuous Queen.

Had ſhe not been Guilty of Murther as well as Inceſt, what Occaſion had the Ghoſt to deſire his Son to offer her no Violence?

But howſoever, thou purſue this Act,
Taint not thy Mind, nor let thy Soul contrive,
Againſt thy Mother ought; leave her to Heav'n,
And to thoſe Thorns that in her Boſom lodge
To prick and ſting her.——

To corroborate other Circumſtances, *Hamlet* in this Scene, directly accuſes her with the cruel Action.

——As bad, good Mother,
As kill a King. ———

Nor does ſhe in the leaſt attempt to prove her Innocence, but confounded with Guilt, deſires her Son to be ſilent on that Head.

O *Hamlet* ſpeak no more,
Thou turn'ſt mine Eyes into my very Soul,

And

And there I ſee ſuch black and grained Spots
As will not leave their Tinct.

This Play is ſaid to reſemble the *Electra* of *Sophocles*, and it is like it in many Reſpects. *Gertrude* and *Clytemneſtra* are Characters nearly allied. Both were Queens, both Adultereſſes, and both of them had their Hands imbrued in the Blood of their Lords and Maſters. The latter had ſome Excuſe for the bloody Deed, the former none at all. She was affectionately beloved by a King who had all the Bravery of *Mars*, join'd with the Beauty of *Apollo*, and ſhe rewarded him for his Tenderneſs, by ent'ring into a Conſpiracy with a cowardly Ruffian, and depriving him of his Life and Crown at the ſame Time. *Clytemneſtra* was no leſs guilty, but more open; ſhe acknowledged the Fact and glories in it. Nay, went ſo far as to declare, that it was Juſtice that ſtruck him, not her alone.

Ἡ δίκη νιν εἶλε, κ' ἐκ ἐγὼ μόνη.

But her Provocations were great. *Agamemnon* had enticed her Daughter *Iphigenia* to *Aulis*, and there ſacrificed her on an Altar, to favour the Cauſe of the *Argives*. This cruel Treatment incenſed her ſo much, that ſhe vow'd Revenge, and the very Night of his Return from *Troy*, aſſiſted by *Egiſthus*, aſſaſſinated him in his own Palace. Honeſt *capricious Ovid*, who is always an Advocate for the fair Sex, excuſes this Lady upon another Account with his uſual Humour.

Dum fuit Atrides una contentus, & illa
Caſta fuit ; vitio eſt improba facta viri.
Audierat, laurumque manu, vittaſque ferentem
Pro nata Chryſen non valuiſſe ſua.
Audierat Lyrneſi tuos abducta dolores,
Bellaque per turpes longius iſſe moras.
Hæc tantum audierat. Priameida viderat ipſa.
Victor erat Prædæ Præda pudenda ſuæ.
Inde Thyeſtiaden animo Thalamoque recepit,
Et male peccantem Tyndaris ulta virum eſt.

De Arte Amandi, Lib. II.

NOTE

NOTE XXIII.

—THIS *was* your Huſband——look you now what follows.
Here *is* your Huſband like a mildew'd *Ear*,
Blaſting his wholeſome Brother.——

Alluſions to Paſſages in Scripture are very frequent in all the Works of our Author, and his Ideas are often enriched by them. This Similitude has great Beauty, and the Contraſt is finely heightened. He hints at *Pharaoh*'s Dream, mentioned in the 41ſt Chapter of *Geneſis*.

" —— And he dream'd, and behold ſeven *Ears* of Corn came up on one Stalk, rank and good—and behold ſeven thin *Ears*, and *blaſted* with the Eaſt Wind, ſprang up after them—and the ſeven thin *Ears* devoured the ſeven rank and full *Ears*."

NOTE XXIV.

WHY look you there! Look how it *ſteals* away!
My Father in his Habit as he liv'd!
See where he goes even now out at the Portal.

The Ghoſt is deſcribed

Arm'd at all Points exactly, *Cap-a-pie.*

and for what Reaſon he *ſteals* away, I am entirely ignorant. Surely *Shakeſpeare* wrote,

— look how it *ſtalks* away.

He uſes the ſame Word twice before in this Play, deſcribing the Gait of the Apparition.

Look how it *ſtalks* away.
Thus twice before, and juſt at this dead Hour,
With martial *Stalk* he has gone by our Watch.

NOTE XXV.

ACT IV. Scene IX.

—YOUR Sum of Parts,
Did not together pluck ſuch Envy from him,
As did that one, and that in my Regard
Of the unworthieſt *Siege*.

i. e. *He did not ſo much envy all your good Qualities put together, as that one; and that* which he regards ſo much, *has the loweſt Place in my Eſteem. Siege, Fr.* ſignifies Seat, and is uſed literally in that Senſe by *Spencer*.

Drawing to him the Eyes of all around,
From lofty *Siege* began, theſe Words aloud to ſound.
Fairy Queen, Book II. Cant. II. St. 39

NOTE XXVI.

ACT V. SCENE I.

Enter two Grave-diggers.

IS ſhe to be buried in Chriſtian Burial, that wilfully ſeeks her own Salvation?

Though this Scene is full of Humour, and had not been amiſs in low Comedy, it has not the leaſt Buſineſs here. To debaſe his ſublime Compoſitions, with wretched Farce, common-place Jokes, and unmeaning Quibbles, ſeems to have been the Delight of the laurelled, the immortal *Shakeſpeare*. Some of his fooliſh bigotted Admirers, have endeavoured to excuſe him, by ſaying, that it was more the Fault of the Age than his, that the Taſte of the People was to the higheſt Degree vitious, when he wrote, that they had been uſed to Buffoonery, and would not be pleaſed without it, and that he was obliged to comply with the prevailing Taſte for his own Emolument. This inſtead of excuſing, aggravates his Crime. He was conſcious

ſcious he acted wrong, but meanly choſe to ſacrifice his Senſe and Judgment to delight an injudicious Audience, and gain the Applauſe of a Herd of Fools, rather than approach too near to Purity and Perfection. To mix Comedy with Tragedy is breaking through the ſacred Laws of Nature, nor can it be defended. The Ancients univerſally agreed in their Definition of Tragedy, that it was the Imitation of one *grave*, entire Action. Indeed the Adventures incident to human Life, often, as they follow each other, form a motley Scene: But it is the Buſineſs of the Poet to ſelect the grave from the ludicrous, and the grand from the mean. It certainly muſt be a great Honour to a Man, who had an abſolute Command over the Paſſions, to profane his noble, moral Scenes, with trifling, vain and impertinent Witticiſms; who, when he had cauſed all Hearts to melt, and all Eyes to ſwim, at the well-painted Repreſentation of human Woe, could tear away the honeſt Impreſſion for the Sake of a miſerable Jeſt. A modern Author ſpeaks very juſtly of him when he ſays.

Pride of his own, and wonder of this Age,
Who firſt created, and yet rules the Stage,
Bold to deſign, all powerful to expreſs,
Shakeſpeare each Paſſion drew in ev'ry Dreſs:
Great above Rule, and imitating none,
Rich without borrowing, Nature was his own.
Yet is his Senſe debas'd by groſs Allay;
As Gold in Mines lies mix'd with Dirt and Clay.

Now,

Now, Eagle-wing'd his Heav'n-ward Flight he takes,
The big Stage thunders, and the Soul awakes:
Now, low on Earth, a kindred Reptile creeps,
Sad *Hamlet* quibbles, and the Hearer ſleeps.
Eſſay on verbal Criticiſm.

This incoherent Abſurdity will for ever remain an indelible Blot in the Character of our Poet; and warn us no more to expect Perfection in the Work of a Mortal, than Sincerity in the Breaſt of a Female.

NOTE

NOTE XXVII.

Scene III.

AS Peace ſhould ſtill her wheaten Garland wear,
And ſtand a *Comma*, 'tween their *Amities*.

This obſcure Paſſage the Rev. Mr. *W*—— has endeavoured to reſtore. His Note is worth reading.

" Peace is here (ſays he) properly and finely perſonalized as the Goddeſs of good League and Friendſhip; and very claſſically dreſſed out." *Ovid* ſays,

Pax Cererem nutrit, pacis alumna Ceres.

And *Tibullus*,

At nobis, pax alma! veni, ſpicamque teneto.

But the placing her as a *Comma* or Stop, between the *Amities* of two Kingdoms, makes her rather ſtand like a Cypher. The Poet without doubt wrote,

And ſtand a *Commere* 'tween their Amities.

The Term is taken from a Trafficker in Love, who brings People together, a Procureſs: And this Idea is well appropriated to the ſatyrical Turn which the Speaker gives to this wicked Adjuration of the King, who would lay the Foundation of the Peace of the two Kingdoms, in the Blood of the Heir of one of them." Sir *Thomas Hanmer*, who often alters the Context, without giving any Reaſon for his ſo doing, is pleaſed to read,

And ſtand a *Cement*, 'tween their Amities.

He does not pretend to juſtify this Reading, and indeed it is out of his Power. The Poet has repreſented Peace as a Goddeſs that hinders Strife, the Critic as a Piece of Mortar. The Truth of the Matter is this, Sir *Thomas* had given over the Paſſage as deſperate, and imagined ſome critical Experiments might be very ſafely tried upon it. I ſhall propoſe another Reading, which ſeems to me to be the true one,

As Peace ſhould ſtill her wheaten Garland wear,
And ſtand a *Comma*, 'tween their *Enmities*.

This is making Peace perform her proper Office; hinder two Nations from deſtroying each other, by ſtanding as a Bar between them. This Word being ill-written or blotted, the Printer

Printer might very eaſily miſtake *Enm* for *Am*, and thereby cauſe the Confuſion.

I cannot conclude without obſerving that Sir *Thomas Hanmer* has anticipated me in Note 8 Act II. Scene IV, and reads

It likes us well,
And at our more conſider'd Time we'll read,
And think upon an Anſwer to this Buſineſs.

Both the Emendations are to the ſame Effect, and which is beſt it is left to the Reader to determine, who will be ſo candid, if he finds I have accidentally made uſe of the Obſervations or Alterations of foregoing Critics, to believe, that the ſame Thoughts occurred to us both, and that it was not done deſignedly or on Purpoſe.

The END.